SPLORES

OF A

HALLOWEEN,

TWENTY YEARS AGO:

BY ALEXANDER DICK.

WOODSTOCK, C. W.:
WILLIAM WARWICK;
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1867.

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PREFACE.

THE following verses were sent to compete for the prize offered in October last, by the Montreal Caledonian Society, for the "best poem on Halloween." They were not successful; and some may be ready to ask, "Why then publish them?" It may be sufficient to reply, "I choose to do so;" "I choose to appeal from the award of the Judges to the decision of the public." A single sentence will explain why I make such an appeal. The gentlemen appointed to act as judges based their decision, according to their published statement, as much upon "suitability for recitation at a public festival," as upon "literary merit." Had this been stated in the advertisement inviting competition it would have been all right. But it is very evident that all poems which might be judged unsuitable for such recitation, would necessarily be excluded from competition, whatever might be their "literary merits," and the successful production could only be that which among the "suitable" was regarded as possessing the greatest literary excellence. It is on this ground—and not because I could be so vain as to think that my production *ought* to have received the prize, while I was altogether unacquainted with not a few others which may have been rejected on the same principle—that I complain of the award of the Judges, and that I now appeal from that award by this publication.

A poem may be very well suited for recitation at a public festival, and possess very slight claims to any literary merit, while another indefinitely superior might not in such circumstances be suitable for recitation at all.

With the public I now leave the decision, and shall cheerfully acquiesce in its award whether favourable or the reverse.

A. D.

Woodstock, C. W., Jan., 1867.

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HALLOWEEN.

This night we meet o' a' the nights,
For fun the very wale,
When melancholy taks its flight,
And graning pains grow hale;
When young anes, wi' sic antic tricks,
And wi' their laughin' music,
Gar auld anes tae forget their cares,
And feel't the best o' physic.

And though wi' some we used to meet
We canna haud this night,
Yet we are here to show we ne'er
Forget tho' out o' sight:—
And o' a HALLOWEEN langsyne,
I will to you rehearse,
And as a canter ye may like,
I'll gied to ye in verse.

Ae night gane bye, at gloamin' time,
When there was muckle steer,
Mang witch and warlock gathered far
To ride in high career,
Some callants met, a merry crew,
Yet each a decent chiel—
Though on that night a' seem'd possessed
O' something o' the deil.

Their runts clean through and through were [bored
And stuffed with raivelins fou,
And like a chimley when on fire
Each could the reek out spue:
And thus convened they council held,
Wi' handsel whar they'd gang;
A' being settled and now dark,
They set off in a bang.

It was resolved that they should try,
On Kate, their Jenny-reeker,
And see if 'twad hae ony guid
Upon a witch to smeek her:
Jock through the key-hole sent a cloud
That reached across the house,
While in below the door reek rushed
Like water through a sluice.

Kate maistly chock't, wi' hostin' seized,
Ran to the door for air,
Wi' open mouth and gaspin' much
O' reek she caught the mair,
Nor could she speak but gasp for breath
When they took to their heel,
But black wi' rage she shook her neive
And wished them wi' the deil.

But whether Kate had power or no
To put them 'neath his will,
Frae this 'twad seem they could na get
O' mischief half their fill;
Frae door to door they madly ran,
Frae door to window flew,
Whare'er a crack or hole they fand
They in the reek did spue:

Till ilka door wide open flew
Wi' bang against the wa',
And some ane gaspin' shouted out
Some threat about the law;
Some chased, mair earnest, wi' a stick;
Auld Jinker threw his last;
And Supplejoints wi' elwand ran
Behind, though he ran fast:

On him they wheeled, and charging, fired,
In turn his Jenny-reeker,
Ane struck him on the head and bounced,
And ane gied him a keeker;
He turned his back and faster ran,
'Twas now their turn to follow—
But ere he reached his door his head
Had mony a heich and hollow.

Nae time was lost—to Rab's they ran,
But ere they reached the gate,
They haulted to mak sure their plan,
And guard against ill fate—
For weel they ken'd that Rab would watch
His cabbages that night,
But they resolved that them they'd hae
Afore the morning light.

Twa slippit up and oped the yett
And tied across a rape,
The others creepit through the hedge
At whar there was a gape,
And creepin' down amang the runts
They pued and pued their wale;
But Rab had spied the twa and thought
To catch them without fail.

They saw him tae, but ne'er let on
Till he at them did grab,
Then shouted as they lap and ran
Weel done! weel done, our Rab!
Rab in pursuit wi' a' his might
Fell lengthways at the yett,
The groans he gied were as the fa',
For Rab was heavy wecht.

But he, wi' noise and very rage,
'Twas said, went maist dementit,
And when he saw his cabbage smashed,
He fell right our and fentit—
For on his door wi' batt'ring rams
They made a grand attack,
And Rab within not darin' out
Was sure he heard it crack.

Nor yet on his alane did fa'
The brunt o' civil war;
A score and mae its hist'ry bear
In mony a dreadfu' scar;
And to relate a' that befell,
The incidents attendin',
This night and maist another till't
Wad scarcely hear the endin':

How Supplejoints a lesson got
To be discrete and civil;
And how it gied the priest a text
On a' the fruits o' evil;
How Grannie Wilson's rack fell down
Wi' sic a fearfu' din,
And owre the floor in bick'rin' race
Ran pewter plate and spune.

How Meg wi' toothache girnin' sat
When startled, sprang a loup
That cured her toothache, but she fell
And coup't the water stoup;
And how quiet Willie frae his bed—
Wha gaed till't aye at dark—
Put past endurance and a' shame
Did chase them in his sark.

But here the battle grew owre hot,
So dreadfu' the alarms,
Now doors ahead wide open stood,
Wharin were mustered arms;
So what wi' those in rear that charged,
And what wi' those in front,
Against sic odds they ken'd 'twas rash
To battle wi' a runt:

So they retreated to the Crafts
And Council held o' war—
A' laughin', talkin', crackin' jokes,
Uninjured by a scar—
When Robie said, come on, let's gang,
Hugh Christie let us cage;
Now, Hugh was crabbit and they liked
To put him in a rage.

Wi' tiptae steps they slippit up,
And firmly tied the door,
Then gently tirled—Hugh cried, "Wha's
Will gied a cuddie's roar— [there?"
Hugh in a lowe, wi' door in hand,
Said he would them he-haw,
When Jock like ony sheep did bae,
And Pate like cock did craw.

Hugh finding that his threats were vain
For that the door was tied,
Began to swear, and kick, and pu'
And "let me out," he cried;
When raging like a very bear,
And down him ran the sweat,
They a' put out their utmost skill
To mak him yet mair het.

Some squeak't on panes, some thump't the door,
Some rumbled on the wa'
Wi' muckle stanes, till Hugh was sure
The very house wad fa';—
Now, Tam, the laird, sat on his loom,
When hearin' sic a racket
He hurried out sayin' to himsel,
Sure Hugh has now gane crackit.

But Tam was late—the stage was clear,
Yet Hugh still raged and swore—
Tam in gruff voice bid him be quiet—
What ailed him at the door?
Now this was mair than Hugh could stan'
Frae Tam to get the wite,
And getting vent, he burst on Tam,
Then baith began to flyte.

Hugh wanted out—Tam wanted in:
Each did the other blame—
Tam cried to Hugh, he'd break the door—
Hugh cried to Tam, gae hame;
But how it ended I ne'er learned,
But 'twas na then and there,
For, Hugh and Tam, they did'na speak
For weeks, and may be mair.

And now to Peggie's they are aff,
Wha's gley'd and maistly blin'—
Hoot! haudawa guid folks! ne'er fear!
They dinna mean o' sin;
They're daft wi' fun and this they ken—
A's game on Halloween—
For Baillies' threats and Provosts' laws
They dinna care a prein.

Jock gied a backie-up to Tam,
And Jimmie he stood bye,
When Tam should gie the chess a rap
That he should then let fly:
Tam gied twa raps, and Jimmie quick
Upon the sole let clash,
Wi' sic a noise that Peggie thought
Had fallen out the sash.

She hurried to the door and then
Weel blackguarded them a,'
As scoundrels, rascals and far war,
Though ne'er a ane she saw;
Then owre the window 'gan to grape
And looked wi' head agee,
But fient a hole or crack she fand
And far less ane could see.

While graping here, and keeking there
In search o' cracks and hole—
For she was sure that some were broke,
For glass was on the sole—
Jock slippit up behind, unheard,
And kittled quiet her lug,
And ere she could to him turn round
He neist gied her a hug.

In muckle rage that ane would daur
Wi' her sic freedom tak,
She hurried in and quick took down
A jug beside the rack,
And filling it wi' water het
Frae kettle on the hob,
She sware his fairin she'd gie him
For sic a shameless job:

But muckle war for Peggie 'twas
To get in sic a fike,
Far better had she taen a stra
And kittled a wasps' bike—
For Nellie Brash was passing bye,
A fish-wife for a tongue,
And Peggie seeing something move
On her the water flung.

But Gude preserve us! what a screigh!
And what a dreadfu' aith!
Than limmar, jad, far war wi' aithis
She ca'd her in hale-claith;
And working hersel' up to wark,
Wi' screigh like ony fien',
She rushed on Peggie like a hawk,
And swore she'd straucht her een.

But Johnnie wi' a pluck that night
Was seen gaun in his door—
Now, a' that ken'd him, ken'd that he
A pluck did 'maist adore;
But maist a jaddie he did like,
Aboon a' ye could name,
For never man liked woman sic
As Johnnie liked his wame:

And Geordie guessing what was up,
Led aff his gallant corps—
Thinking it prudent Nell and Peg
Should settle their ain score—
They helped him up upon the dyke
And canny he crawled up
The gavil cape-stanes on his knees,
Till lum-head he did grup;

And raxing up upon his taes,
He neist looked down the lum,
Just then he heard a lively skirl
And Johnnie's weel-pleased hum,
And, thro' a pue o' steam and reek,
He saw amid a glow
The pan and in't a fork did pat
As to the tune—"My Joe"!

And bending owre he aimed fair
A stane as big 's my han',
And drappin 't down—a blaze got up—
He'd coupit owre the pan—
Quick as a squirrel he dreipit down
And owre the yard he ran,
As quick cam Johnnie to the front
A sair bewildered man;

And standin' out fornent the door
He stared up at the lum,
But fient a thing there could he see
Like either head or bum;
Then north he ran, then South again
The lum to look about,
But naething did he see or hear—
It must hae been Auld Cloot:

Anither might hae blamed some ghaist,
But Johnnie's faith was matter,
He never dreamed o' starin banes,
His thoughts were something fatter—
He now looked up, then down the street
If he the cause could fin'—
Jock keeking round the corner, now,
Said to his neighbours—rin.

And aff they ran, and in an ace
They a' were out o' sight—
Now, Johnnie seeing naething that
Could throw on 't ony light,
Bethinkin' o' his pluck gaed in—
The sight was nane to please,
For some amang the ashes lay,
The rest was in a bleeze:

Did Johnnie, hank'rin', now sing dool?
Our birkies naething rued;
Nae sooner were they aff wi' him
Than a new splore was brewed:
Though muckle tickled at the thought
O' Johnnie's clappit wame—
Which might hae been as stent's a drum
And witness o' its fame—

Yet mair, by far, they liked sic fun
As garred the bluid weel dance;
They liked a chase frae ane that could
Break wi' them sic a lance:
Now, Jimmie Adams was that ane,
Nae daighie but guid mettle,
And he had what did recommend—
A wee spice o' the nettle:

That mettle they resolved that night
To put to sairest test,
Nor wad the faut be theirs if not
The nettle stung its best,
For Willie frae his pouch had taen
And charged a muckle scout,
And said that Jimmie he wad show
The wonders o' a spout.

Now weel they ken'd that he wad chase
And that tae like a gru'—
And whom he caught he'd mak him squeel
As e're did ony sow—
But what had they to fear frae him?
Each suppler than anither,
Nor was there ane but what might be
To Asahel a brither.

But they made ready for the race;
Their breeks they buckled up;
Their bonnets pued down to their lugs;
Their jackets buttoned up;
And aff they a' for Jimmie's set
When coming near the house,
They on their tiptaes slippit up
As quiet as ony mouse.

Will by the curtain keeking in
Saw Jimmie at his supper,
And aye the spune gaun round the bowl,
Syne dippin' in the butter;
He whispered this in Tammie's lug;
Tam oped the outer door—
Then Willie followed close behind
As silent as afore:

Tam cautious oped the inner door,
It gied the slightest squeak,
And Jimmie wondrin' what it was
In listenin' turned his cheek—
Just then a strone frae Willie's scout
Shot right into the spune,
Which was as fixed in middle way
Between the bowl and chin:

Bang, bang, gaed inner, outer door—
Nor Jimmie wi' a clout
Did dicht the parritch frae his face,
But up, and he was out:
Now, Tam and Will did trip and fa',
Ane north, ane south, were seen—
Out Jimmie cam, and trippit tae,
And fell right in between.

First down, first up, they aff like hares,
Each takin' different airts;
Nor there lay Jimmie lang to grane
And haud the bluidin parts—
But like a gru' he aff and ran
Wi' bicker down the street—
Na need had Tam, nor did he let
The dirt stick to his feet.

First down ae street, then up anither,
Then through an entry ran—
Here Jimmie, furious, in the dark,
Maist coupit owre a man—
He lost some grun, but did'na wait
If down to help him up—
His lufe owre youky was, to stay,
O' Tam to get a grup.

Thus Tam did lead, thus Jimmie chased,
Maist owre half o' the town,
But wishing Jimmie warmer wark
Began to wear him roun'
To Johnston's Corner as agreed,
There he his neighbours met,
Wha, seeing Jimmie in pursuit,
Took owre the Kirk-yard yett :

There Jimmie followed—now was fun—
A' round the kird did rin,
Like drove o' stirks wi' tails on end,
And raging bull behin' ;
Syne out amang the headstanes ran,
And there they jouked about,
Here mony a jerk did Jimmie get
As he ran in and out.

At last he fell—they heard him pech
But saw nor heard na mair—
They did'na wait to ask him if
The part he hurt was sair ;
But owre the dyke they maistly flew,
Syne yont the Crafts like stour,
Whar on the grass they lay and laughed,
And joked for maist and hour.

Till Jock said he na supper had,
That he was now gaun hame—
That he was as a whistle tume;
As tume as Johnnie's wame;
And Robie said he could na stan'
That he was maist clean gane,
His brawns he said gaed flappin round
And round about the bane.

But whether Sandy gaed straucht hame
Or no, there is some doubt,
For on neist morn, cencerning him,
A something leaked out;
The outs and ins I canna tell—
Some mystery about pouther—
Pate Bryce scarce put the kettle on,
When it flew owre his shouther.

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